



News from

Congressman Ron Kind

*REPRESENTING WISCONSIN'S THIRD
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT*

Looking through the Holes of the New Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit

By Congressman Ron Kind

Far too many seniors are forced to split pills or decide between doctor-ordered medications and other necessities. This last year, Congress had an opportunity to address this crisis situation and provide a meaningful prescription drug benefit. Unfortunately, the bill that the President signed into law contains fundamental flaws that will end up costing seniors more.

One of my initial concerns with the new Medicare bill is that it ignores opportunities for savings by prohibiting the federal government from negotiating lower drug costs and by forbidding the re-importation of FDA approved drugs from Canada. Wisconsin has always been a leader on health care issues, and Governor Doyle is continuing this proud tradition with a website that allows Wisconsin citizens to order drugs from safe, Wisconsin-approved Canadian pharmacies.

Another element of the new drug plan to be wary of is the gap in coverage known as the 'doughnut hole.' While sizable portions of the bill's funding are set aside for incentives to private insurance companies to establish drug-only benefits to compete with Medicare, the prescription drug benefit structure has a gaping hole that will leave millions of seniors without drug coverage when their annual costs are between \$2250 and \$5100. This hole reestablishes itself every year and is likely to expand as drug costs increase.

There are many who share my concerns with the new prescription drug bill. Even AARP, which came out in favor of the original bill and helped to seal its passage in Congress, has identified cost containment and closing the 'doughnut hole' among its legislative goals for 2004. The President has stated, however, that he intends to veto any measure that seeks to change the current benefit program.

Seniors have waited far too long for a meaningful and affordable drug benefit that relieves them of out-of-pocket costs so they can enjoy a high quality of life during their golden years. I feel that the lack of cost controls and the gaping hold in coverage in the new Medicare prescription drug bill are unacceptable. A better drug plan is one that curbs the rising costs of prescription drugs and provides a benefit that is both guaranteed and affordable.

While I didn't vote for the Medicare prescription drug bill, it is the current law, and it is important that recipients of the drug benefit have meaningful information about the law and understand what the new benefit entails. As always feel free to contact my office in La Crosse at 1-888-442-8040 with questions or concerns. You may also email me by visiting www.house.gov/kind/emailron.htm

Visit the front page of Congressman Kind's website at www.house.gov/kind to calculate the out-of-pocket cost of your prescription drugs with the new Medicare benefit. Visit the state of Wisconsin Prescription Drug Resource Center at www.drugsavings.wi.gov